

Our Transportation System is in Crisis - 74

A former classmate of mine at St. Mary's College, and now an accomplished traffic engineer in Canada, sent me some information on the Government of Ontario public transport plan for 2020. Its cost is 17.5 Billion Canadian dollars. The Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is one of the fastest growing regions in North America, increasing its population by approximately 100,000 people—and 50,000 cars—every year.

The economic cost of congestion in the GTA is around Can\$ 2.2 billion per year. By 2031, this will rise to nearly Can\$ 4.1 billion if action is not taken now. The plan calls for 66 per cent of the projects to be completed by 2015, and 95 per cent to be completed by 2020. It will result in 800 million new transit trips per year, taking 300 million car trips off GTA roads. By 2020, this will reduce carbon dioxide emissions in the region by 10 megatonnes.

An annual growth of 100,000 persons and 50,000 cars! What is ours like in TnT? It is 6,500 – 8,500 persons and more than 10,000 vehicles! So the annual rate of growth in TnT for autos is currently nearly twice the national population growth. What a transport policy!

"Transforming our system will not happen overnight, but it must be done," said Ontario's first female Minister of Transportation, Donna Cansfield. "We need to develop a sustainable transportation system which gets people out of their cars and onto transit to reduce congestion and improve our environment."

The Greater Toronto Transportation Authority (GTTA) was created so people in the Greater Toronto Area and Hamilton region will spend less time commuting, and to ensure that public transport is an appealing option for commuters, and to build a transportation system that will contribute to the quality of

life and promote a clean, safe environment.

GTTA's mandate is to ensure that all levels of government work together to develop a long-range transportation plan in consultation with a broad range of stakeholders, including students, seniors, persons with disabilities, businesses and industry. The authority is responsible for regional transit and transportation planning, purchasing transit vehicles on behalf of municipalities, and ultimately the operation of the GTA integrated Fare Card System for GTA and Hamilton, and the future management of Ontario transit.

The Ontario Government has invested Can\$ 700 million in gas tax revenues in transit, and people across Ontario are spending less time waiting for a bus, riding more accessible buses and taking advantage of increased service on weekends and evenings. In 2006-07 the Ontario Government's investment of two cents per litre in gas tax funding means Can\$ 313 million in 86 transit systems in 104 communities across the province. The funding formula is based on a ratio of 70 per cent ridership, and 30 per cent population. This means that 70 per cent of the projected 2006-07 allocation (Can\$ 219 million) will be distributed to municipalities on the basis of their transit ridership levels and 30 per cent (Can\$ 94 million) will be distributed on the basis of their population. By the end of 2007, ridership is expected to grow by 31 million - the equivalent of removing 25.8 million car trips from Ontario roads.

Some other Ontario transit investments include:

- Building Ontario's first-ever High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes on the 400 series highways, leading to travel time savings of up to 20 minutes per trip.

- Invested Can\$ 57 million for York Region's VIVA Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system
- Provided funding to replace, refurbish and expand municipal transit fleets.

So the Ontario Government has determined that the following are critical to a sustainable and effective transportation system:

- Creation of transport authority;
- Consultation with a broad range of stakeholders;
- Investment in transit subsidy from fuel taxes;
- Creation of HOV lanes;
- Investment in BRT; and
- Replacement and expansion of transit vehicles

They have recognised that attractive, convenient, and cost-effective transit development is essential to reduction in private auto usage and ultimately ownership.

Thus far in TnT, very few people have commented on the hazardous environmental impacts of rapidly increasing carbon dioxide emissions caused by high auto usage. For example, it may be quite interesting to find out what is the level of air pollution caused by vehicles around the Queen's Park Savannah where so many of our people are seen jogging and exercising in order to keep fit and healthy! Perhaps even more interesting may be to research the literature on health and safety impacts of auto carbon dioxide emission intensities when compared with motor vehicle traffic accident injuries.

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